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GAZETTE

EVENING 92,860

Nixon's Cuba Charge

DID JOHN F. KENNEDY know about the plans for the Cuban invasion before he won the 1960 presidential election?

Richard M. Nixon says "Yes." President Kennedy says "No." At worst, somebody is lying. At best, there was what former CIA chief Allen Dulles calls "an honest misunderstanding." But could there really have been a misunderstanding about a matter of such national consequence?

Nixon charges that on September 19, 1960, Kennedy was briefed by Dulles on the planned Cuban invasion. Shortly thereafter, Kennedy came out strongly for full United States aid to the anti-Castro forces. The issue came up on the fourth TV debate between the two candidates, where Kennedy once again called for strong anti-Castro action. Nixon, although he knew about and approved the invasion plans, says that he was forced to attack Kennedy's proposal as "wrong" and "dangerously irresponsible" in order not to jeopardize the security of the invasion.

KENNEDY NOW DENIES that he knew anything about the invasion plans. Dulles backs him up. But what kind of briefings was Kennedy getting if he was not told about something that was common knowledge in Florida and throughout the Caribbean and was so vital to the nation's future?

The whole incident points up the

dilemma facing a democratic government when it is conducting supposedly clandestine operations. Many Americans were shocked when Washington was caught in a bare-faced lie at the time of the U2 incident. Many others also probably are disturbed by Nixon's candid statement that he was forced to resort to deception to protect the national interest. Some will wonder whether Kennedy is being completely candid in disavowing all knowledge of our designs on Castro.

RIGHT at this very moment American troops and American airmen are helping to fight an undeclared war in Indochina. But, for reasons of policy, officials believe that the full story cannot be divulged at this time without hurting the national interest.

It has long been an axiom of any free people that the public has a right to know. But no nation can conclude from this that its enemies also have the right to know its secret plans. There is no easy solution to the dilemma. Sometimes there seems to be no solution at all.

What will be the final verdict on the Kennedy-Nixon quarrel is anyone's guess. But the incident at least has the merit of calling the attention of the American people to the special difficulties facing a democratic government during a political campaign, when issues of national import are thrown into the arena of partisan debate.